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Very few of us thought about becoming a bureaucrat when we grew up. A pilot, teacher, minister or even President, perhaps; but a bureaucrat? Never! The popular image of such an individual is not favorable. He or she generates paper, is insensitive to people's needs and loves to place hurdles in the way of progress. The press has a field day with lead stories relating the horrors of bureaucratic error:

- A Chicago woman undergoing chemotherapy for cancer of the breast applied for Medicare. She received a computer-produced letter indicating she was ineligible since she had died the previous April.
- The Department of Energy set out to declassify millions of documents inherited from the Atomic Energy Commission. Eight of the released documents contained the basic design principles for the hydrogen bomb.
- A unit of what is now the Department of Health and Human Services sent fifteen chimpanzees to a Texas laboratory for the purpose of launching a chimp-breeding program. All were males.[1]

These items are startling and certainly interesting, therefore newsworthy. They are news, however, because they are extraordinary occurrences. The fact that 98 percent of Medicare recipients receive their checks on time does not constitute news. The atypical event, coupled with the pejorative perception of bureaucracy, combines to make a media headline.

For our purposes, the military executive should not dwell on the popular image but rather on bureaucracy as a form of formal organization. It is within this organizational environment that the military member has and will continue to function in the performance of duty.

Aspects of Bureaucracy

"Modern man is man in organizations."[2] Brief reflection reveals that people spend a significant portion of their time acting in or being impacted upon by organizations. From birth to the grave—hospitals, schools, colleges,

Professor Farrell, who earned his Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Michigan, specializes in the study of policy-making and implementation. He is the author of *U.S. Government Response to Terrorism* and is currently on the faculty of the Naval War College.

military training, work, and morticians—all forms of organized activity play a role in facilitating our entry into and departure from this earthly realm.[3]

Organizations come into existence when explicit procedures are established to coordinate the activities of a group in the interest of achieving specified objectives. What makes the study or organizations particularly interesting and necessary is that actual interaction and activity within them rarely correspond to official prescriptions and design. Further it is often difficult to determine the boundaries of an organization, to know definitely where one organization ends and another begins. It is not unusual for some one or group from outside a particular organization to be able to influence what goes on within an organization.[4] The influence of congressional committees upon Department of Defense (DOD) spending is quite profound. Yet, no study of DOD in and of itself would develop this information.[5]

Senior military executives should fully appreciate that governments perceive problems through organizational sensors. Alternatives are defined and consequences estimated as governmental organizations process information. Governments act as their organizations enact routines. The Department of Defense is made up of other organizations among which primary responsibility for particular tasks is divided. DOD behavior thus reflects the independent output of several organizations, partially coordinated by leaders who can "substantially disturb but not control the behavior of these organizations."[6]

One of the earliest attempts to analyze the impact of organizations on society was conducted by the German sociologist, Max Weber. He asserted that one of the major features of modern society was the presence of large multifaceted organizations—or bureaucracies—which possessed a regulated impersonal framework where hierarchy and specialization were the dominating characteristics. A "bureaucracy" was characterized by the following features:

- Organization tasks are distributed among various positions as official duties. Implied in this is a clear-cut division of labor among positions which make possible a high degree of specialization. Specialization, in turn, promotes expertness among organizational members.
- Positions or offices are organized into hierarchical authority structures.
- A formally established system of rules governs official decisions and actions. This insures a standardization of operations and a continuity of operations regardless of changes in personnel.
- Officials are expected to assume an impersonal orientation which is designed to prevent the personal feelings of officials from distorting their rational judgment.
- Employment by the organization constitutes a career during which officials are appointed by and thus become dependent on their superiors.[7]

Implicit in much of the early study of bureaucracy was the assumption that organizations have a set of goals that are widely shared by members of the organization. This tendency led to the description of bureaucracies as cohesive units. "In fact, the members of the same bureaucracy may have different goals."[8] While signs on the fourth floor of the Pentagon speak of "One Navy," a discerning wanderer of those hallowed halls will hear conversations emanating from doorways which indicate there are, in fact, several navies—that either fly in the air, float on the surface or move quietly below the depths, some on the east coast some on the west. During the preparations for budget submissions these conversations will include raised voices, as "the Navy" moves toward fulfillment of its many competing goals.

One danger in the pursuit of bureaucratic goals is the phenomenon of goal displacement. The emphasis on the way goals are to be reached leads to a transference of member sentiments from the aims of the organization to the particular details of behavior required by the rules. Adhering to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes an end in itself. Thus, "an instrumental value becomes a terminal value."[9] This emphasis develops into rigidity and an inability to adjust readily, to the point where concern with conformity to the rules interferes with the achievement of the purposes of the organization.

A good example of this phenomenon was demonstrated while organizing the Joint Task Force to free the hostages in Iran, November 1979 through April 1980. A report issued 24 August 1980 by Admiral James L. Holloway III, U.S. Navy (Ret.) states that the "seemingly non-discriminating over-emphasis" on secrecy compromised the mission from the beginning. All other issues, including the ultimate goal of freeing the hostages, somehow became subordinated to what should have been one aspect among many, i.e., clear lines of command, adequate coordinated training, intelligence gathering, etc. In each of the problem areas surrounding the mission, the review group was able to name an alternative course which it concluded "would have had no effect or only a minimal one on security while substantially—if not critically—improving the chances of success."[10]

Bureaucracies tend to factor problems, avoid uncertainty, and look for satisfactory or optimal solutions while carrying out standard operating procedures. This one-thing-at-a-time approach is fundamental to the very existence of what is termed organizational structure. Bureaucratic structure consists of those aspects of behavior that are relatively stable and that change only slowly. At any given time an organization's programs for performing its tasks are part of its structure.[11]

Closely related to this is a bureaucracy's tendency to vest and weigh particular interests and perspectives.[12] Bureaucratic arrangements—that is the existence of specific departments, the distribution of powers among them, and procedures for communication—determine whether and how effectively

particular considerations will be represented. A central question in bureaucratic design is what substantive perspectives should be introduced and with what weights in the decisionmaking process. An interest can be vested in several ways but most vividly in the creation of a specific agency expressly dedicated to a particular value, i.e., equal opportunity, ground safety, or parts procurement oversight. Giving weight to an interest is another matter. It could come about from formal authority, from control of resources or from special competence. Weight does not follow, however, as a matter of course from vesting.[13]

The reliable performance of a task requires standard operating procedures (SOPs). These rules permit standard action by large numbers of individuals responding to basic cues. The rules are generally simple enough to facilitate easy learning. Since the procedures are "standard," they do not change easily or quickly. Further, because of SOPs, bureaucratic behavior in particular instances can appear formalized and inappropriate.[14]

Bureaucracies conduct actions in which the behavior of hundreds of individuals is closely coordinated. Assured performance requires sets of SOPs for producing specific actions. These sets comprise a program that the organization has available for dealing with a situation. The list of programs constitutes an organizational repertoire. The number of programs in a repertoire is always limited and cannot be easily changed in a particular situation.[15]

The Iranian rescue mission also provides a clear example of how organizations have performance difficulties when leaders do not rely on standard programs. The Holloway Report took issue with the *ad hoc* nature of the organization and planning of rhe mission. "By not utilizing an existing JTF (Joint Task Force) organization, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) had to start, literally, from the beginning to establish a JTF, create an organization, provide a staff, develop a plan, select the units, and train the force . . . ." Existing Contingency Plans (CONPLAN) were not employed, and while the particular circumstances surrounding the Iranian mission may have differed, established programs would have provided the "conceptual basis for an additional capability." The Holloway group's evaluation made it quite clear that the "application of an existing JCS CONPLAN and JCS/Service doctrinal precepts could have improved the organization, planning, and preparation of the force through unity of command and cohesion of effort. That, in turn, would have led to more effective command and control and enhanced overall JTF readiness."[16]

Sometimes shifts in bureaucratic behavior are the result of action by government leaders. While these leaders have limited ability to make changes in particular organizations' SOPs, many important issues require that senior officials decide what organizations will enact what programs. Thus important shifts in the behavior of government can take place with little change in a

particular organization's parochialism. The leaders' options for shifting governmental behavior include: triggering program A rather than B; triggering existing organizational routines in a new context; triggering several different organizations' programs simultaneously; or shifting action responsibility from one organization to another.[17]

The term bureaucracy does suggest a certain bareness exemplified by a system of consciously coordinated activity. Yet, such a formal design never completely accounts for what participants do. Formal procedures may coordinate roles and specialized activity, but not people. "The formal technical system is therefore never more than a part of the living enterprise we deal with in action."[18] The relations outlined in an organizational chart provide a framework within which fuller human behavior takes place.

Policy Tool or Scapegoat

Many studies assume that the activities of national security bureaucracies are planned and purposeful. Yet, more commonly, situations exist where there is constant change, with several participants entering the process at different times, attempting to define a complex situation where values and decisionmaking variables make analyses most difficult. The result is more a form of organized anarchy where activity is described afterwards in a fashion that appears rather systematic.

Some analysts assert that, in fact, bureaucracies are set up for failure. This is because the goals established by political superiors are often inconsistent, contradictory and thus unachievable. Statutory mandates which either create or impact upon agencies are often deliberately phrased in vague or ambivalent language to meet the desires of competing political interests.

Even if agency goals are clear initially, they almost inevitably become confused as statutes are amended, political leadership rotates, and hidden agendas emerge inside and outside the organization. Whoever is at fault, the public agency too often ends up with diverse goals nested in a lofty but meaningless ideological mission. Sometimes expectations are even directly contradictory. Regulatory bodies must both restrain and promote the industries they regulate, agricultural bureaucracies try to expand farm productivity while keeping commodity prices high, prisons should confine convicts securely and cheaply but are expected to rehabilitate their psyches.[19]

James Q. Wilson has commented that the "bureaucracy problem" grows out of conflicting public demands for accountability, equity, efficiency, responsiveness and fiscal integrity. The more a bureaucracy is responsive to its local clients, the less it can be accountable to Presidential directives. And a preoccupation with fiscal integrity can make the kind of budgeting required by enthusiasts of efficiency difficult, if not impossible.[20]

Is DOD being responsive to the economic demands of an entire state when it keeps open an inefficient military facility? Is a weapon system which meets rigid fiscal requirements necessarily the most effective one in combat? Does equity through equal access to all combat specialities conflict with the goal of an effective military? Such "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situations are the source of much of the criticism heard about bureaucracies. "Incumbent officeholders can point to an incompetent bureaucracy as the reason why past policies did not achieve their touted ends. Candidates challenging incumbents can use bloated bureaucracies as an issue, without saying anything substantive or risking opposition. Conservatives can employ the bureaucracy myth as a rationale to reduce spending and taxes, cut back government regulation, decimate welfare programs, and push Proposition 13-type constitutional amendments. Liberals find it convenient as well; they can denounce bureaucracy as oppressing the poor, suppressing its employees, helping big business, and endangering civil liberties."[21]

Government bureaucracies are turned to by the people to solve pressing problems. The voice of the people is manifested through elected representatives, who create agencies to solve a perceived need—care for the elderly, reduce crime, provide defense. The actions called for are highly dependent upon events in the external environment. Members of bureaucracies are asked to accurately predict what will happen "out there" to justify why they plan to undertake plan X and not plan Y. When this external environment does not behave as predicted, the employees of the bureaucracy are singled out for blame.

The key point is that bureaucracies are tools which function within a larger environment. Bureaucracy did not create our economic problems and inequities. Bureaucracy did not cause international differences or racism. Bureaucracy did not establish the constitutional separation of powers that encourages uncertain policy direction and frequent political deadlock. Whether you find comfort in the reforms of a Franklin Roosevelt or the conservative practices of a Ronald Reagan, you will discover a bureaucracy at work turning policies into actions.

Bureaucracy should be viewed not as some large threatening "thing" but rather as concrete institutions upon which people depend for information, services and security. Vital services are routinely provided and taken for granted. When a mistake occurs, however, the bureaucracy is fair game for all the politicians, reporters and academics who specialize in making suggestions without ever assuming executive responsibility.

While the negative connotation ascribed to bureaucracy is stylish, it may be more appropriate for those who function poorly within it than for the organization itself. Mastering knowledge of bureaucracies and how they carry on the business of the day is a fundamental step for the successful military executive. Such an individual must have "the patience to accept

what cannot be changed in the organization, the courage to change what can be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference."[22]

Notes

1. Charles T. Goodsell, *The Case for Bureaucracy* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1983), p. 3.
2. Peter Blau and W. Richard Scott, *Formal Organizations, A Comparative Approach* (San Francisco, Calif.: Chandler, 1962), p. ix.
3. Joseph A. Litterer, *Analysis of Organization*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1973), p. 5.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
5. Lawrence J. Korb, "An Analysis of the Congressional Budget Act of 1874," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1977, pp. 40-52.
6. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 69-71.
7. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 196-204.
8. James C. Thompson, *Rolling Thunder* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 108-109.
9. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1957), pp. 195-199.
10. "Desert One Revisited," *The Washington Post*, editorial, 31 August 1980, p. D6. This opinion is shared by the author, who has read the Holloway Report in its entirety.
11. Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1976), pp. 169-171.
12. Graham Allison and Peter Szanton, *Remaking Foreign Policy: The Organizational Connection* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 21-22.
13. The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency was created in 1961 (vested) for the purpose of giving institutional voice to that serious problem. Recent history has shown that the *weight* possessed by the Agency is not all that substantial with the President, State, and DOD all participating/controlling to some degree.
14. Allison, p. 83.
15. James G. March and Herbert Simon, *Organizations* (New York: Wiley, 1958), p. 150.
16. James L. Holloway III et al., "Rescue Mission Report," Report prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff concerning the Iranian hostage rescue attempt, Washingtou, D.C.: August 1980, pp. vi; 17-18.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
18. Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 8.
19. Goodsell, p. 62.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
22. David R. Hampton et al., *Organizational Behavior and the Practice of Management* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1968), p. 185.